Understanding the Systemic Shift and Impact of School Resource Officers on School Climate

An Honors College Thesis (HONR 499)

by

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Abstract

Schools are a prominent aspect of our society and are now responsible for far more than just educating the youth of America. With the rise in fear of mass school shootings came the responsibility of schools to maintain the safety of students and teachers. At the heart of this push to ensure safety within schools are School Resource Officers (SROs). In order to conduct learning, schools have resorted to the use of zero tolerance policies to manage students' behavior. These methods for student learning have had numerous negative effects, ultimately leading to the school-to-prison pipeline. While these policies were in place before SROs were placed in schools for safety, the roles of SROs have shifted drastically towards management and discipline roles, contributing to the perpetuation of zero tolerance policies and the school-to-prison pipeline. This paper discusses the implications of SROs in our schools and the school-to-prison pipeline and offers suggested policy recommendations to restore schools with an increased climate for learning.

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Process Analysis Statement

While engaging in my studies to become an educator at Ball State University, I found myself wanting more. I desired to learn more, dig deeper, and think more critically. In realizing this about myself, I discovered an opportunity to be part of an immersive experience where I would be able to engage in all of those and more. During this one semester, I learned what it truly meant to be an educator. It isn't enough to just teach. Rather, I must teach in order to honor cultures, build up identities, and create lifelong learners and citizens. I must also ask difficult questions about the world around me and my own position within it. I am forever thankful for these experiences in the local school, after school program, and in class with amazing professors. As I stepped back onto Ball State's campus and into another elementary school, I realized that my mindset and lens was forever changed. I saw education in a different light. My inspiration for this thesis developed in one encounter in my practicum placement, one that left me concerned and overwhelmingly upset.

In this event, I encountered School Resource Officers (SROs) being misused within a school. As I was learning to become a culturally responsive educator, I already saw a large problem with the use of SROs in schools because of the way it appeared to affect the climate of the schools and my students. But, as I went to my practicum placement that day, I was not prepared for the event that was about to transpire. On this day, I witnessed one of my students get dragged across the floor by an SRO. As soon as this incident happened, I knew I needed to do research to inform my understanding of the purpose of SROs in school. From this experience in the school, I began observing the effects of SROs' presence on the teachers and the students. The students appeared scared and it was evident that the environment was not welcoming.

I didn't want to use this single story I witnessed as the basis for my final belief about the topic, but rather, I wished to critically analyze and examine other stories about the effects of enforcement in elementary schools. I began this project to help inform myself of the consequences of such interactions. But soon, I realized this topic was part of a much larger conversation involving zero tolerance policies, the school-prison pipeline, and the criminalization of children behavior more broadly. In seeing this, I decided to broaden the scope of my research. Throughout this project, I have expanded my knowledge of the history of SROs, how they have influenced our school systems, and the role SROs and schools play in our justice system.

To address my research questions, I conducted a comprehensive literature review. I gathered and analyzed various pieces of literature that discussed and addressed the rising of the school-to-prison pipeline and zero tolerance policies through the perspectives of teachers, students, administrators, and SROs within school systems. Although prior to my research I had my own beliefs on this matter, in researching this topic I have been able to further assess the effects of law enforcement in elementary schools and come to a better understanding of what is the appropriate role such enforcement serves. I also was able to become more knowledgeable about the correlation between zero tolerance policies in schools and the rising school-to-prison pipeline, a big problem that is facing our nation.

To begin, I first developed my targeted research questions to narrow the scope of my focus. While creating my overarching questions, I discovered relevant topics that would inform my research: the history of SROs, zero tolerance policies, the roles of SROs, school-prison pipeline, mindset changes in teachers and students, environmental effects, restorative justice practices, and so on. I found the majority of sources for this thesis using Ball State University's

OneSearch online database. I used search terms such as: “criminalization of behavior in elementary schools,” “behavior enforcement in elementary schools,” “no excuse policies elementary schools,” and “management in schools.” At the beginning, I struggled to find any articles that discussed the environmental shifts in schools due to the presence of SROs. This changed the scope of my research a bit, causing me to research more about SROs themselves and the effects of zero tolerance policies and the school-to-prison pipeline in combination. I then started using terms such as: “zero tolerance,” “school-to-prison pipeline,” “school resource officers,” and “restorative justice.” This shift in search terms resulted in an abundance of articles that helped me develop my research for this paper and answers to address the questions posed from my spark in interest for this topic.

In selecting articles, it was important to select ones that were current. The majority are from 2000-present. The vast number of articles I selected for this research were from 2011 to the present, with the majority of them written within the last five years. This was crucial to my research because it is a reflection of current trends. As I pulled articles, I read through the abstracts to ensure that they matched my topic themes. After I had gathered a large number of articles for a particular search term and topic, I would read through each of the articles. As I read, I would highlight and make notes about my thoughts, noting important points and overlaps between topics. Once I finished an article, I wrote a small summary, creating an annotated bibliography that I could later reference to find the information needed to write this paper. I examined the areas covered by the articles that I had gathered and used that to inform whether I needed to find more support for particular topics. In total, I selected about 20 articles.

Following the completion of my annotated bibliography, I looked through my articles and summaries to find common themes and gaps in the research. What I found was that many articles

discussed the ways SROs continued to perpetuate the trend of the school-to-prison pipeline, gave an overview of SROs, made comparisons of classroom management to the use of SROs, and offered ways to build back our school systems with restorative justice practices. From this, I devised an outline for this paper that sectioned out the particular common themes in my research. I then developed a plan for writing. While writing, I noticed areas of research that needed more depth, therefore, I conducted more research using the same methods listed above. As a result of my process of researching, I also noticed the major shift in my thesis statement as my time working with this topic continued. Nearing the end of my work, I finalized my paper with revisions to ensure the common themes and statements were both strong and supported by research.

The major themes that were discovered through research were organized into a cohesive paper. The first major point outlined in this paper discusses an overview of SROs and their progression into schools. Next, I relay classroom management strategies, uses seen in the classroom today, teacher biases, and how those methods have been influenced by SROs. Then, I examine the rise of the school-to-prison pipeline and zero tolerance policies in our school systems. I additionally address who these policies affect most. Finally, I offer suggestions and recommendations to administration, educators, and pre-service teachers on ways to move away from punitive policing practices seen with SROs, and toward systems that build up students and prioritizes the formation of relationships and care to improve safety. All of this is beneficial in my pursuit to become an educator.

My purpose in researching a topic such as this was to better understand a timely issue, one with significant impacts on children, families, schools, community, and society. As a result of this project, I have a better understanding of the educator I wish to become. I also realize the

need for policy makers and school officials to be aware of the impacts. I hope that my thesis can influence them because what is unfolding now in schools with regard to SROs, zero tolerance, and the school-prison pipeline is not okay, and cannot, and should not, be ignored.

Introduction

> *"At the heart of this intersectionality are the SRO programs that place sworn-officers in an environment populated by young people; rather than improve the safety and security of students, SRO programs have been observed as a core factor in the rising criminalisation of misbehaviour in the American school system" (Bleakley & Bleakley, 2018 p. 259).*

Armed officers in schools. School Resource Officers (SROs) arresting students. Student suspensions and expulsions for minor infractions. Schools are frequently referred to as "safe places" for children, however, that vision of safe, rarely, if ever, seems to involve law enforcement. Yet, police presence in school is becoming a more common occurrence. The fear of mass school shootings has prompted schools to invite SROs into schools resulting in increased surveillance.

While the original intention of bringing SROs into schools was to bridge school with the community and to maintain safety of students, SROs are frequently being misused. In fact, it is becoming more apparent that SROs are a means to not only ensure security but to also assist in other duties in the school such as management and discipline (Bleakley & Bleakley, 2018). Thus, students are increasingly found at home (i.e. suspensions and expulsions) and eventually in our justice systems (Fowler, 2011). Additionally, the arrivals of SROs, and related policies, seem to disproportionately affect students from marginalized and minoritized backgrounds (Cole, 2019). What was meant for security and community relations has actually perpetuated the school-to-prison pipeline (Cole, 2019; Fowler, 2011).

In this paper, I examine the rise of SROs in schools and their relation to the school-to-prison pipeline, zero tolerance policies, and mass incarceration. I argue that despite what might

have been good intentions to improve student/school safety, the presence of SROs have had a negative impact in schools. In particular, we see these negative impacts through increased youth arrests, mental health implications, and attitudes towards education. I will also provide recommendations to policymakers and school leaders to remedy this trend. Specifically, I look at how restorative justice policies would be more effective in making our schools safe than increased policing. I hope that my findings can inform policymakers and school leaders to create more welcoming and affirming spaces for all children.

Problem Statement

There has been a rise in the nation's prison population. Concurrently, the number of School Resource Officers (SROs) in schools has also seen a rise. While these two statistics may not seem to have any correlation with one another, they in fact are very much linked. SROs' interactions with students in schools have been one of the contributing factors to what is known as the school-to-prison pipeline. Students who have interactions with SROs in school are more likely to end up in our justice system (Fowler, 2011).

As SROs become ever-present in schools, especially now in elementary schools, they often take on roles beyond maintaining safety, such as management and discipline (Bleakley & Bleakley, 2018). The fact of the matter is that schools are increasing their surveillance of children. While SROs are meant to protect students from potential external harm, they are often policing student behavior within schools (Cole, 2019; Fowler, 2011). As a result of this, typical youth school behaviors are increasingly criminalized (Bleakley & Bleakley, 2018). For example, in 2016 a middle school student was handcuffed, arrested, patted down, and taken to the juvenile detention center for burping repeatedly in class (Bleakley & Bleakley, 2018). Or, more recently, a 6-year old was arrested for throwing a tantrum in school (Padilla, 2019). The criminalization of

students in schools means children have a greater risk of entering our justice system. This phenomenon is called the school-prison-pipeline and refers to the connection between misbehavior in school and subsequent interactions with the justice system (Bleakley & Bleakley, 2018; Cole, 2019). Rather than making schools safe for children, schools become less safe as children are policed. This, of course, undermines student learning (Bleakley & Bleakley, 2018; Rubin, 2012).

What are the effects of increased law enforcement and the related criminalization of typical student behaviors? In particular, how does this affect teacher mindsets, student success, and the overall environment of the school? These posed questions were the driving force in my desire to research and learn more about the implications of SROs in schools. In order to answer these questions, and because of my own personal experiences, I wanted to better understand what the research says about the impact of SROs and related policies on children—particularly on elementary students. As such, I have undertaken a detailed literature review to explore this topic. I reviewed several areas of focus including: the school-to-prison pipeline, zero tolerance policies, classroom "management," the rise and history of SROs, and restorative justice practices within schools.

Given the scope of the problem, some essential questions that guided this initial process to research and understand the impacts of SROs were:

- How does having resource officers in the building affect the overall environment of the school? Classrooms? Teachers? Students?
- How do SROs influence the mindset of administrators, teachers, and students within the schools?

- What are the reasonings that have led to the increase in SROs in schools and the rise in population in our justice systems?
    - What are zero tolerance policies?
    - What is the school-prison pipeline?
- How are different populations of students affected? Particularly, how does race impact these policies?

This paper presents an overview of SROs in schools and explains the connection between SROs, the school-to-prison pipeline, and zero tolerance policies. The answers to the above questions have helped to inform my beliefs about the efficacy of SROs and the ethics behind their use in our schools. In response to what I learned about the impact of SROs and zero tolerance policies, I also reviewed possible alternatives to using SROs in schools—ones that more align with our task as educators to develop lifelong learners and future citizens.

It is essential to learn about the impacts of SROs, zero tolerance policies, and the school-to-prison pipeline because in understanding these impacts, we can seek methods to reverse them. Specifically, educational stakeholders may benefit from the research that was gathered in this paper, as it may inform them of policy regulations to be made and/or altered. It is especially important for those involved in school systems, such as administrators and educators, to be informed so we can help prevent the school-to-prison pipeline and zero tolerance policies from progressing. Education researchers may also be interested in learning about the relationship of SROs, zero tolerance policies, and the school-to-prison pipeline and wish to conduct even more research, especially around the impact of SROs and zero tolerance policies in elementary schools, where not much research has been done. Currently, there is little to no research on how SROs affect school climate nor is there much research on the training SROs receive before

entering into schools, two things I wanted to learn more about when I started this project but was unable to so due to the lack of available research.

Thesis Statement

While SROs were initially placed in schools to maintain safety from external threats and create community connections, it is evident that their roles have shifted. Increasingly, SROs are responsible for discipline and management of students and are a contributing factor to the perpetuation of the zero tolerance policies and, ultimately, the school-to-prison pipeline. In order to reverse this trend, I argue that SROs should be removed from discipline and management roles. If SROs are to remain in schools, their only jurisdiction should be to focus on protecting our students from external threats. Instead, schools should engage in restorative justice practices. Zero tolerance policies are concerned with punishment and discipline of students to ensure "bad" behavior stops. Restorative justice, on the other hand, is focused on student/teacher accountability, repairing harm, and teaching students to take responsibility. Restorative justice practices seek to address the underlying causes that prompt student behaviors and ultimately build a community of lifelong learners.

My thesis is based upon data from the effects of zero tolerance policies, school-to-prison pipeline, and growth in the criminalization of students. Research has shown that the rise of SROs in schools has not had the intended outcomes of safety and peace, community relationships, and to foster learning for all students. In combination with zero tolerance policies, students are at risk for increased participation with the justice system. With the implementation of restorative justice, schools can form relationships in order to better serve students' mental, physical, and intellectual needs.

Literature Review

The History of School Resource Officers

There has been a drastic increase in the mandates for School Resource Officers (SROs) to be placed in schools (Indiana Legislature, 2000). Recently, Indiana legislation has called for an SRO to be present in all schools, a move consistent with growing trends nationwide. A School Resource Officer is "'a career law enforcement officer, with sworn authority, deployed in community-oriented policing, and assigned by the employing police department or agency to work in collaboration with school and community-based organizations'" (Girouard and Raymond, as cited in Theriot and Cuellar, 2016, p. 363). While the increase in SROs continues to grow, the question of how and why they have become prevalent in schools is important to understand.

The first SROs in schools were used as a means to connect the community and the schools together. The original goal was to create a school-community partnership to not only keep the peace in schools and educate youth, but also to influence youth in ways that prevented further run-ins with police. As Barnes (2016) explains, the original purpose of SRO programs was seen as "partnerships between police and schools" and "were based upon the theory that early contact between juveniles and the police would help prevent future inclinations" (p. 197). Bleakley & Bleakley (2018) note that the initial presence of SROs in schools was to inform students about road safety or substance abuse, as well as to promote community relations. SROs came into schools for specific occasions or to run specific programs that informed students about safety measures. For example, SROs would prepare presentations about law enforcement duties in the community and safety tips for students. However, these seemingly good ideas have not

always resulted in the intended improvement of safety and community relations (Thompson & Alvarez, 2013), as will be discussed later in this paper.

While these programs were important, the recent rise in SROs can be primarily attributed to the reactions to one specific event, or series of events: mass school shootings. According to Madfis (2016), "Over the last two decades, school safety policies have been driven, at least partially, by reactions to extreme events, especially the fear of multiple-victim rampage attacks with guns and explosives" (p. 39). Madfis continues to say that "some scholars have argued that the 1999 massacre at Colorado's Columbine High School, in particular, has had a profound impact upon public perceptions and policy debates surrounding school crime and safety" (p. 39-40). In support of this, Bleakley & Bleakley (2018) state,

> The presence of SROs in schools did not become prevalent throughout the United States until the mid-1990s. Increased incidences of gang violence in schools and the moral panic that occurred in the aftermath of the 1999 Columbine High School mass shooting led to a rise in support for the presence of police in educational facilities. (p. 249)

Yet, "fear also leads us to do things in pursuit of safety that may do more harm than what we're afraid of in the first place" (Ropeik, 2018, n.d.). As people became more fearful of mass shootings and violence in schools, there were increased numbers of SROs placed in schools to patrol halls for the safety of students. But this frequently resulted in officers policing students and focusing more on the management and discipline of students instead of protecting schools from mass shootings or external threats. Fowler (2011), when referring to the fear of weapons in schools, explains this correlation by saying "extensive publicity surrounding very isolated incidents of horrific school violence, such as the Columbine High School shootings, succeeded in intensifying those fears, leading to an expansion of school-based policing and zero tolerance

discipline" (p. 15). This article draws attention to the fact that while SROs were placed in schools as a result of the intensified fears due to mass school shootings, the presence of SROs has subsequently resulted in an increase of strict policies such as zero tolerance discipline. These policies suggest that students have no room for behavior mistakes—that is, there is zero tolerance for misbehavior (Skiba & Peterson, 1999, p. 1).

While the fear of another school shooting has caused real panic, Madfis (2016) seems to believe that it is "exaggerated and distorted" (p. 40). This panic was especially seen post-Columbine in the minds of students, staff, and parents within schools because people thought if it happened once it could happen again; and to their child this time. Yes, school shootings are a valid fear. And yes, they have changed the manner in which we run schools. Yet, in terms of probability, a school shooting is far less likely to occur than many in our country assume. As the Washington Post explains, "the statistical likelihood of any given public school student being killed by a gun, in school, on any given day since 1999 was roughly 1 in 614,000,000" (Ropeik, 2018). This probability is far lower than any other mortality rate children may face such as traveling to school or contracting a sickness (Ropeik, 2018). Despite this small risk, many still think "what if the 1 is my child?" (Ropeik, 2018). They also wonder who will be the next group or person(s) to "pull a Columbine," which is precisely why it still exerts a significant amount of weight on the decisions about school safety. Thus, school officials have now determined that SROs are an important piece to school safety (Madfis, 2016) and have even mandated SROs reside in schools as a means to maintain safety and peace from external threats within the school's walls (Indiana Legislature, 2000).

So, in response to mass school shootings and the perceived need for a safer environment in schools, administration and legislation have called for SROs to patrol in schools to ensure the

safety of each student from any external threats, prevent unauthorized access to school property, and secure schools against violence and natural disasters (LawServer, 2018). SROs are to accomplish this goal by walking halls, being readily available if a violent threat occurs, and building proactive outsider access measures within the school. Yet, as Madfis (2016), drawing upon previous research, argues "rates of youth violence and school violence remain lower than the early 1990's, yet most of the policies and procedures formed in the initial wake of public anxiety over school rampages remain in place" (p. 43). Out of fear of school shootings, the police have been invited into schools to police students with dire consequences (Pigott, Stearns, & Khey, 2018).

School Resource Officers Today: A Shift in Roles & Responsibilities

A review of recent trends reveals a significant shift in the roles SROs play in schools. As stated above, they were originally placed in schools to maintain the safety of the students and staff. However, "it is clear that the role of the SRO has evolved over time and taken on responsibility for enforcement of compliance in schools across the United States of America" (Bleakley & Bleakley, 2018, p. 250). In many cases, SROs have a new duty in schools: management and discipline. Management and discipline have traditionally been the responsibility of the classroom teacher and school administrators. Yet, when "resource officers are available, teachers and administrators have been shown to be more likely to relegate discipline responsibilities to those officers" (Thompson and Alverez, 2013 p. 130). Instead of utilizing the tools and skills teachers are equipped with to address student issues, it appears that increasingly they are relying upon SROs to "handle" situations for them.

Yet, SROs are not trained to work with students in the ways that teachers are in pre-service teacher programs. Indiana Legislation (2000) and LawServer (2018) state that SROs are

to receive 40 hours of resource officer training that has instruction regarding skills, tactics, and strategies necessary to work on a school campus and ensure security needs within the school building. While 40 hours of instruction seems to be sufficient, it is nowhere near the hours of training teachers receive to work with students. Yes, a teacher's role and an SRO's duties are very different. But, if SROs are to work with students in proper ways to ensure their safety, shouldn't they receive training similar to the values upheld in a teacher program? As Thompson and Alvarez (2013) argue: "resource officers need support and training to work within existing school-based prevention efforts to foster a nurturing school climate" (2013 p. 135). SROs are trained in the same exact ways that police officers are trained. Additionally, they don't have many extra regulations for being in a school. Yet, they are being used as teachers in classrooms.

When teachers allow SROs to "handle" management in the classroom, they potentially put their students at harm. In one case, for example, students were arrested for sharing selfies (Soave & Kotesky, 2017, p. 51), clearly a much stronger punishment than is typical. Referencing Skiba and Peterson's work, Bleakley & Bleakley label enforcement policies as ''authoritarianism, incompatible with the functioning of a democracy, and certainly incompatible with the transmission of democratic values" (2018, p. 252). SROs tend to use their strict, and sometimes forceful, officer training (Thompson & Alvarez, 2013, p. 133), often using their police training to work with students by forcing them to be obedient to their authority as an officer. Frequently, SROs response to disciplinary issues results in a minor, non-violent incident turning into a violent and criminal offenses that negatively affects students (Cole, 2019). Additionally, Theriot and Cuellar (2016) state "research has found that the physical presence of SROs in the school setting is negatively associated with students' feelings of safety in school" (p. 364). A place that is meant to be safe for students has now been correlated with feelings of

negativity or anxiety. If the goal of placing SROs into schools was to create a safer environment, we don't actually seem to be meeting this goal.

It is evident that school personnel utilize SROs for far more than their instructed jurisdiction: to keep students and staff safe from external threats. They are used for discipline, management, and many other issues school staff do not want to deal with. As a result, SROs are viewed less as the community assets they were originally intended to be (Thompson & Alvarez, 2013). Pigott et al. (2018) hit at the sight of SROs in schools by stating, "police and SRO presence in schools has become a common occurrence, so common that the line between the roles of officers of the law and school employees has become blurred" (p. 124). The word "blurred" used in this description allows a visual of just how much the line between safety and discipline has been crossed over and over again. Overwhelmingly, SROs are a "response to all issues" (Barnes, 2016, p. 199). When does this misuse stop?

In summary, over time, the way SROs are used in schools has changed, much of this prompted by events like mass shootings. The issue of mass school shootings remains, but the rarity in which they actually occur (about 1 in 614,000,000) does not match the rate at which SROs are found in schools, which is estimated at about 19,000 SROs in 2017 (Wolf & Kupchik, 2017; Ropeik, 2018). This change has affected many other aspects of our school systems including the feeling of the school and how teachers work with students. The new roles SROs have taken on have come with higher stake consequences for students (Fowler, 2011). Rather than building community-school partnerships or being used to protect students' safety from outside threats, increasingly SROs are used to manage and discipline children (Bleakley & Bleakley, 2018). This new jurisdiction fosters a number of other issues within our school systems and our society, as will be discussed throughout this paper.

Classroom "Management" in Schools

Bleakley and Bleakley (2018) argue that the presence of SROs has influenced teachers' philosophies on management practices. They state that "the rising confluence of education and law enforcement has certainly had a significant impact on the underlying philosophies of behaviour management" (Bleakley and Bleakey, 2018 p. 248). The article further states:

> use of SROs in the application of behaviour management strategies in a school is indicative of a seismic shift in the conventional power structure of the education system. Classroom management has traditionally been the purview of individual teachers and employed on a subjective case-by-case basis. (Bleakley and Bleakley, 2018, p. 255)

Classroom management has always influenced classrooms, and typically each individual teacher develops their own methods. But, with the arrival of SROs, there has been a shift in terms of how teachers work through issues that arise within their classrooms. Frequently SROs are used as an extension of teachers' management practices, often resulting in their problematic use because the "presence [of SROs] in such an environment allows for the temptation to misuse their authority as a behaviour management strategy" (Bleakley & Bleakley, 2018, p. 248-249). Furthermore, teachers resort to calling the SRO to the room to "deal" with students. Instead of taking the responsibility to engage their students, teachers are seeking SROs to handle the situation (Rubin, 2012). Administration, too, have come to rely on SROs for disciplinary action. As one superintendent said, "administrators at his various schools were in the habit of calling the cops as frequently as five times per day." (Soave & Kotesky, 2017, p. 48). Due to the shift in SROs acting as the disciplinarians in schools, we need to understand how underlying management strategies have been influenced.

The purpose of classroom management is to create a safe environment that maximizes learning. The term classroom management is very misleading because there are varying philosophies and styles that each school, classroom, or teacher uses. Some educators may say that it refers to the control they have over a classroom. Some think of it in terms of discipline and routines in a classroom. Others see its purpose as establishing student self-control in a process of positive student achievement and behavior to foster learning (Chandra, 2015). According to Evertson and Weinstein there are two distinct purposes of classroom management. Classroom management not only "'seeks to establish and sustain an orderly environment so students can engage in meaningful academic learning, it also aims to enhance student social and moral growth'" (Chandra, 2015, as cited in Evertson and Weinstein, 2006 p. 4).

But many teachers focus more on the control and behavior aspects than on academic engagement (Rubin, 2012). "Classroom management programs invariably urge teachers to begin the year by taking control and laying out their expectations for student behavior—along with what will be done to those who disobey" (Kohn, 2016 p. 4). A good method, in theory, to have compliance and order, but it seemingly does not prioritize relationships or seek student social and moral growth. It is evident that many schools might be missing the true point of what classroom management should look like in a classroom (Smith, Fisher, & Frey, 2015). Already, many schools have focused on compliance and order. So, the transfer of discipline did not seem to be a problem once SROs arrived in schools.

There are many different ways classroom management takes form. For example, teachers may cultivate a caring approach to build community by welcoming and valuing all students and allowing students to have ownership in the environment (Chandra, 2015; Kagan, n.d.). Or, they may use strict rules and regulations in order to control student behavior (Wolf & Kupchik, 2017).

In extreme cases, these management philosophies look like zero tolerance policies (Bleakley & Bleakley, 2018). While all are methods of classroom management, they don't all have the same outcomes. Methods that focus on control tend to "dangle rewards in front of students when they act the way we want: praise and privileges, stickers and stars, and other examples of what has been called 'control through seduction'" (Kohn, 1996 p. 2). They also tend to take something away from a child who didn't do what was asked of them (Kohn, 1996). It seems as if kids are learning more about how to perform good behavior or avoid getting caught misbehaving rather than actually learning to change their behavior or learning skills that prepare them for the real world (Kohn, 1996). The focus on classroom management often still lies on just one aspect: behavior. When teachers expect students to focus simply on doing what they say, whether it is through the use of bribes or using negative consequences, the result is we are asking students to be compliant and obey authority—much like what we see from the use of SROs as the management system.

These methods of classroom management have not been ideal for student learning (Rubin, 2012), often resulting in student disengagement in school, "but compliance and control are still schools' primary tools to meet academic goals" (Rubin, 2012 p. 44). The fact of the matter is that these methods are not effective in achieving the underlying goal of classroom management: learning. When educators' classroom management strategies focus on compliance and order, studies have shown that it undermines efforts to prepare youth to become responsible and independent in their learning (Rubin, 2012). Additionally, "to 'manage' students' behavior, to make them do what we say, doesn't promote community or compassion, responsibility or reflection" (Kohn, 1996). It is through this ability to teach social skills along with academic skills that students can learn to become lifelong learners and responsible citizens (Smith et al.,

2015). As well, when teachers engage students in learning, they are less likely to misbehave (Chandra, 2015). Even still, we see the roles of educators shifting as SROs in schools increase and we see harsher discipline practices becoming normal.

teacher bias and management.

Teacher biases about student learning and which students are learning are not a fair judgment of a student's ability. These biases are typically formed on the basis of stereotypes—of preconceived notions of how a specific group of people may perform or behave (Campbell, 2015)—and influences management philosophies (Kohl, 1994; Weinstein, Curran, & Tomlinson-Clarke, 2003). When these biases are formed, they can be hard to break and as a result, affect how teachers view their students, and eventually how students view themselves as learners (Kohl, 1994). "To agree to learn from a stranger who does not respect your integrity causes a major loss of self. The only alternative is to not learn and reject the stranger's world" (Kohl, 1994 p. 6). Our failed attempts to recognize our biases unknowingly affects our students' learning, feelings of self, and can result in harsher punishments (Weinstein et al., 2003). Teachers' biases were previously formed before the arrival of SROs, so the transition to utilizing them as management methods was not a hard transition. Similarly, the use of harsh practices seen in zero tolerance policies were formed far before placements of SROs in schools. Teachers have adopted them as a means to, yet again, "manage" students—and preconceived biases might partially be to blame.

Zero Tolerance Policies

"Beginning in the 1990s, public schools in the United States have increasingly turned to exclusionary school discipline practices as routine responses to student misbehavior, even when

the infractions are relatively minor" (Wolf & Kupchik, 2017 p. 409). The responses to these behaviors can include removing students from classrooms, expulsions, suspensions, and even arrests. These types of policies and regulations in schools fall under a type of policy called zero tolerance. According to Skiba & Peterson (1999), zero tolerance policies are those that "punish all offenses severely, no matter how minor" and "grew out of state and federal drug enforcement policies in the 1980s" (p. 1). From there, zero tolerance migrated to schools where it was used as a means to create a strict learning environment through total control and authority. In some cases, students have been known to receive detention for "eating too loud" (Soave & Kotesky, 2017, p. 51). Bleakley & Bleakley (2018), referencing Skiba's work, explain, "zero tolerance behaviour management strategies were in direct opposition to the principles of social inclusion…zero tolerance policies are inherently exclusionary and result in the removal of vulnerable students from the school environment for a wide range of infractions" (p. 254). Many incidents are fairly minor, but are treated as major infractions (Cole, 2019).

In fact, the zero-tolerance philosophy is to treat all incidents at schools as if they were severe enough for intervention (Cole, 2019). For example, schools who use this approach to education set clear expectations on how students dress, walk, enter a classroom, walk upstairs, present themselves in class, organize their school work, and so on. If a student's behaviors fail to reach any one of these expectations set by the school, there would be consequences such as losing some of their good behavior merit dollars or not being able to attend a school field trip (Golann, 2015). In some cases, students have been expelled for eating their Pop Tarts "too aggressively" (Soave & Kotesky, 2017, p. 51). In my own personal experience in a school with similar policies, I received detention for not wearing a belt and additionally for forgetting to have my parents sign my test. Advocates for zero tolerance policy say that zero tolerance is the only

way that our society can get students "under control" in order to learn at school (Skiba & Peterson, 1999).

While initially designed to address extreme incidents in schools (i.e., drug use, violence), it has evolved to include a "no excuses" approach to behavior management. "At the core of zero tolerance philosophy and policy is the presumption that strong enforcement can act as a deterrent to other potentially disruptive students" (Skiba, 2014 p. 28). This move toward more punitive and exclusionary classroom discipline mirrors the practices in society as a whole; in specific, practices in the criminal justice system like mandatory minimum sentencing and "three strikes and you are out" policies (Duvernay & Moran, 2016; Pigott et al., 2018).

SROs are seen as valuable resources to help achieve the goals of zero tolerance. Bleakley & Bleakley (2018) concluded that there are a significant number of connections between zero tolerance policies in schools and the employment of SROs in schools that criminalize behavior. Behaviors that once only resulted in school-based consequences now have the potential to be taken up by the criminal justice system. While zero tolerance policies initially were meant to track those involved with weapons and drugs, this is not what we see zero tolerance policies used for now (Skiba & Peterson, 1999). Wolf & Kupchik (2017) addresses the issue saying, "officers respond to incidents of student misbehavior, such as breaking up fights in the hallways, and arrest students accused of criminal behavior, thus expanding the potential disciplinary consequences facing students" (p. 410). While students may have previously gotten in trouble for these behaviors, because an SRO is in the school, students may now face criminal charges as well:

> Students at schools with a SRO presence are five times more likely to be arrested for disorderly conduct...SROs and their use as a behavioural deterrent can be seen to

> influence a juvenile's likelihood of recidivism and heavily impacts upon their involvement in the school-to-prison pipeline. (Bleakley & Bleakley, 2018 p. 247)

As teachers continue to rely more upon SROs as a means for discipline, the likelihood of criminalization of behavior increases. SROs become one of the primary mechanisms for carrying out zero tolerance policies in schools and continue to be used for duties that don't necessarily fall under their jurisdiction (Cole, 2019). Rather they tend to implement regulations that hinder students (Bleakley & Bleakley, 2018; Fowler, 2011; Rubin, 2012).

One issue lies in an overreaction to many behaviors which results in expulsions or suspensions. Skiba (2014) determined that there are thousands of incidents in the US where the punishment for the offense is so far out of scale. For example, a student was arrested in an elementary school during lunch because he cut in line to grab a milk or the Pop Tart example discussed above (Soave & Kotesky, 2017). This results in an increasing number of students out of schools due to minor incidents. The expulsion rates are a huge issue, as students who are pushed out of schools are more likely to be put into prison cells (Cole, 2019). It has been estimated that about 3.5 million students across the US public schools are suspended each year. To put this into perspective, more students in grades K-12 are suspended each year than the number of high school seniors in the US (Mowen, 2017, p. 834, citing Losen et al., 2015). This number is extremely high, higher than intended with the implementation of these programs. Research also has observed that after four years of the implementation of these policies, suspensions increased by 51 percent and expulsions increased by 32 percent (Cole, 2019). One in three students are estimated to be suspended at some point in their schooling (Mowen, 2017). The continuation of these programs will only increase these numbers even more.

These trends and policies are creating outcomes that were never meant to occur (Mowen, 2017). For example, data show that, "school rates of out-of-school suspension are moderately associated with lower graduation or higher dropout rates and greater contact with the juvenile system" (Skiba, 2014, p. 30). School suspensions and expulsions create a higher risk for students to be held back, not graduate, be suspended again, and even go to jail (Schiff & Bazemore, 2005). "Once suspended or expelled, data show that students are less likely to complete high school, more than twice as likely to be arrested while on forced leave from school, and more likely to be in contact with the juvenile justice system during the year that follows the leave" (Cole, 2019).

The fact of the matter is that, "no data exist to show that out-of-school suspensions and expulsions reduce disruption or improve school climate" (Skiba, 2014, p. 29). Those who are putting these policies into place may think that zero tolerance is lowering the amount of violence or disruption, but in actuality zero tolerance is exacerbating this even more. This is seen through the lack of consistency in the policies, the outcomes due to punishments, and the unequal representation of races in offenses (Pigott et al., 2018). In response to the issues that were being seen with zero tolerance, The American Psychological Association commissioned a Zero Tolerance Task Force to study the effectiveness of the program. In their review of their extensive research: "An examination of the evidence shows that zero tolerance policies as implemented have failed to achieve the goals of an effective system of school discipline" (Skiba, 2014, p. 31). Students' success is cut short when they are no longer allowed to attend their school. When students are removed from schools, we take away their opportunity to learn and replace it with a greater opportunity to end up in jail (Cole, 2019).

Additionally, Schiff and Bazemore (2005) argue that "zero tolerance tend[s] to put students at greater risk for decreased connectivity to school, increased participation in risky or illegal behavior, poor academic achievement and dropout and, for many, subsequent entry into the prison system" (p. 70). Zero tolerance policies not only physically take students out of schools, but they have a detrimental impact on students' mental states (Pigott et al., 2018). Because these policies often result in social exclusion and academic disengagement, "considered together, the potential effects of school disengagement, alienation, labeling and diminished social worth may also threaten students' long term mental health" (Wolf & Kupchik, 2017, p. 414). The social exclusion and academic disengagement that comes along with zero tolerance influences how students view themselves in terms of success (Rubin, 2012). Our school systems are the means in which our future citizens are prepared to enter the world (Wolf & Kupchik, 2017). The social settings and experiences children encounter in schools set them up for their futures. In inhibiting this, schools can severely damage students now and in the future. In contrast with the stated intended goal of zero tolerance—to improve the school learning environment—the policies are actually having the opposite desired effect and creating a pipeline to our justice system from our schools. And this is truly a disappointing finding.

The data overwhelmingly continue to show the repeated ineffectiveness of these policies and we are failing our students by subjecting them to these types of environments in schools. As mentioned above, zero tolerance policies have a strong correlation to the increase in expulsions and dropout rates. The increase resulting from the rise of zero tolerance policies and practices i creates another issue that is facing our country: a growing number of children entering our juvenile justice system. This phenomenon is referred to the school-to-prison pipeline and has occurred simultaneously with the increased presence of SROs in schools. As Schiff and

Bazemore (2005) argue, “zero tolerance policies have in fact had considerably more far-reaching negative consequences and been viewed as largely responsible for the ‘school-to-prison pipeline’” (p. 70).

The School-to-Prison Pipeline

The rise of SROs and zero tolerance policies have created many unintended outcomes for students (Thompson & Alvarez, 2013). On the top of this list is a phenomenon called the school-to-prison pipeline. “The School to Prison Pipeline refers to ‘the growing pattern of tracking students out of educational institutions and tracking them directly into the juvenile and adult criminal justice system’” (Heitzeg, as cited in Pigott et al., 2018, p. 121). This term, school-to-prison pipeline, means that children who have a run-in with SROs or enforcement in schools are more likely to enter into the justice system later on in their life (Cole, 2019). This link can be attributed to the push out of students for seemingly minor infractions (Cole, 2019). In fact, there is, “a correlation between being suspended and eventually being involved in the justice system. Likewise, several researchers have demonstrated a link between educational failure and criminal involvement in adulthood” (Wolf & Kupchik, 2017, p. 411, as cited in Fabelo et al., 2011).

The term school-to-prison quite literally refers to a pathway for children to walk from the school-house doors to prison cells (Cole, 2019). This may seem like an unlikely trend, but data confirm it over and over again (Bleakley & Bleakley, 2018; Pigott et al. 2018). Dr. Nicki Lisa Cole found that the two greatest contributors to the pipeline are zero tolerance policies and the presence of SROs. She states that after the implementation of zero tolerance policies, some school expulsion rates have increased more than 300 percent. After these expulsions, students are

pulled from a supposedly safe environment and forced on leave (i.e. suspensions or expulsions), which has been found to increase chances of jail time twice as much (Cole, 2019).

> Rather than being socialized by education-focused peers and educators, students who have been suspended or expelled will be socialized more by peers in similar situations. Because of these factors, the punishment of removal from school creates the conditions for the development of criminal behavior (Cole, 2019).

Through these expulsions, which occur in response to the use of zero tolerance policies, we place students in an environment that perpetuates their placement in the justice system. Students don't find their belonging in school (Kohl, 1994), but rather inside the prison cell (Cole, 2019).

The school-to-prison pipeline explains the increase in youth filling our juvenile detention systems. These policies put in place in our schools are feeding our justice systems, fueling the pipeline, and mass incarceration. According to a study that was performed by the Public Policy Research Institute at Texas A&M University, "the single greatest predictor of future involvement in the juvenile system is a history of disciplinary referrals at school" (Fowler, 2011, p. 16). Fowler (2011) continues to say how this is a big factor in student dropout and ultimately the school-to-prison pipeline.

While SROs may not be the sole contributors to the school-to-prison pipeline, contact with officers still has an effect on many students ending up in the justice system. It has been suggested that SROs "feed" the school-to-prison pipeline because of the frequency at which students are suspended and/or expelled from school and thus derailing their learning towards exposure in criminality (Wolf & Kupchik, 2017; Cole, 2019; Bleakley & Bleakley, 2018; Fowler, 2011). However,

> Regardless of the presence of SROs in the school environment, the use of enforcement-oriented behaviour management strategies like zero tolerance serves as a contributing factor in the so-called school-to-prison pipeline. This term is often used to describe the perceived connection between the American education system and subsequent interactions with the judicial system. (Bleakley & Bleakley, 2018, p. 255)

In some ways school systems begin to resemble prisons rather than schools. The correlation between zero tolerance policies and the school-to-prison pipeline seems a bit ironic because the policies were put in place to shift schools away from the violence and misbehavior. But actually, by using these policies, the numbers in our justice system have increased (Cole, 2019). “School discipline has increasingly moved from the schoolhouse to the courthouse” (Fowler, 2011, p. 16). Our schools can’t continue to become prisons or allow for students to go from school and right into jail cells.

Who is Most Affected by These Policies?

While zero tolerance policies and the school-to-prison pipeline continue to be a pressing issue in our country, those mostly affected by these policies continue again and again to be those from minoritized backgrounds. Many articles, research, and data show these unfair trends. Fowler says, “African American students are overrepresented in all categories of discretionary expulsions from public school” (2011, p. 18). Many minoritized populations are targeted and encounter SROs more often (Cole, 2019).

It is also important to recognize that the majority of schools implementing these policies are overwhelmingly attended by students from minoritized backgrounds (Cole, 2019). Wolf & Kupchik (2017) also found this to be true, stating, “schools with large populations of

racial/ethnic minorities are more likely to rely on exclusionary, criminal justice-oriented security and punishment, rather than restorative or inclusionary practices" (p. 411). At the same time, Wolf & Kupchik (2017) concluded that, "approximately one in seven Black students is suspended each year, compared to one in twenty of their white counterparts" (p. 411). The suspension rates for black youth is 3 times higher than that of white youth (Mowen, 2017, as cited in The United States Department of Education Office for Civil Rights, 2014, p. 834). The work of Pigott et al. (2018) also concluded that African Americans and other minoritized groups are disproportionately affected by the policies and additionally so has the work of Bleakley & Bleakley (2018), Ramey, (2015), Mowen (2017), Schiff and Bazemore (2005), and so many others in support of such findings.

It is truly unfair that minoritized populations are disproportionately affected by these policies, although perhaps it's not surprising given the same trends exist in our criminal justice system. In our population, people of color represent just 13 percent of the whole population, but they comprise 40 percent of the population in the justice system (Cole, 2019). To put this trend into perspective of inequality, whites represent 64 percent of the population but only occupy 39 percent of the prison population (Cole, 2019). Somehow, a smaller portion of our population represents a much larger portion of the prison population. This unfair representation is partially a result of those impacted by the school-to-prison pipeline. "What all of these data show us is that not only is the school-to-prison pipeline very real, but also, it is fueled by racial bias and produces racist outcomes that cause great harm to the lives, families, and communities of people of color across the United States" (Cole, 2019).

What Does All This Mean?

The rise of SROs in schools has been a contributing factor to the normalization of zero tolerance policies and the school-to-prison pipeline, practices that are very detrimental to students' progression of learning. In fact, they have become so normal that there has been a push for an increased budget to allow for more people to occupy prison cells. "From 1987-2007, funding for incarceration more than doubled while funding for higher education was raised by just 21 percent" (Cole, 2019, as cited in PBS), a shift supported by government funding. These numbers seem to show that our country values the justice system more than our education system.

SROs originally entered our schools with the intention to bridge community gaps (Barnes, 2016). Later, that role shifted to maintaining the safety of students and teachers after tragic events like Columbine (Madfis, 2016). There has been a noticeable shifting, again, in the jurisdiction of SROs towards discipline and management of students (Pigott et al., 2018). Teachers and administrators, once seen as primarily responsible for behavior management, now often resort to utilizing SROs to deal with the issues that arise. While zero tolerance policies and the school-to-prison pipeline were already in place in some schools prior to the arrival of SROs, the addition of SROs accelerated the normalization of these practices, resulting in increased numbers of students entering the justice system (Bleakley & Bleakley, 2018). This shift in the use of SROs has had a significant impact on teachers' philosophies of behavior management (Bleakley & Bleakley, 2018; Kohl, 1994; Weinstein, Curran, & Tomlinson-Clarke, 2003). By continuing these policies, schools create an environment that invites students into our justice systems rather than into learning (Cole, 2019). This prominent issue facing our school systems should be considered a priority to fix. The practice of restorative justice is one such fix.

I argue that SROs should be removed from discipline and management roles. If SROs are to remain in schools, their only jurisdiction should be to focus on protecting our students from external threats. I also argue that schools should stop using punitive behavior management systems and instead engage in restorative justice practices. Restorative justice is focused on student/teacher accountability, repairing harm, and teaching students to take responsibility. Restorative justice practices seek to address the underlying causes that prompt student behaviors and ultimately build a community of lifelong learners.

What can we do?

It is evident that something needs to be done in order to change schools for the children we wish to educate and the world we desire. So, what can WE do as educators or school officials? Well, we could just rid our schools of all SROs, but does that fully and completely solve the underlying issues that will continue to occur based on the system we have in place? While SROs have been a contributing factor to the increase in the school-to-prison pipeline, the conditions pushing schools toward this trend were in place before SROs arrived. For example, as discussed above, our school systems make many assumptions about children in terms of the need to control them, assumptions often influenced by race (Campbell, 2015). Those biases would remain and show evidence of a system that has always been set up to reinforce white, middle class norms (Weinstein et al., 2003). Thus, just simply removing SROs does not fix the broken system that would remain.

Another option could be that we put even more regulations on the use of SROs in the buildings in terms of when and how they are used in the schools. Our children have been harmed by the mistreatment of SROs **and** our fellow teachers; harm that is seen through their deteriorated mental health (Pigott et al., 2018), and their increased likelihood of entering the

justice system (Cole, 2019). Children have been on the receiving end of the negative impacts of our efforts to make schools safer. Rather than using SROs to maintain a safe environment, they have been used for school discipline and management (Bleakley & Bleakley, 2018). It is time we start rebuilding our school system from the ground up. That starts with first, removing SROs from management and discipline roles, second, addressing teacher biases, and third moving away from punitive classroom management and towards implementing restorative justice practices within the entire school to create a welcoming climate for learning.

The culture that a school carries has a great influence on the learning that takes place (Weinstein et al., 2003). Many schools, especially those relying on the policies outlined above, perpetuate broken relationships and are built upon misconceptions and lack of care (Chandra, 2015). Practices such as zero tolerance, SROs in schools, and poor classroom management have contributed to this negative culture throughout schools (Bleakley & Bleakley, 2018). As has been demonstrated throughout this thesis, students become disengaged with the learning process as a result of these policies and practices (Rubin, 2012). A positive environment is important because it allows for safe learning to occur—as was the intention behind employing SROs originally. School culture sets the "weather," or the tone, for the type of learning that will take place (Weinstein, 2003). Positive cultures look and feel welcoming. They value relationship building, responsibility, and restoration (Zaslaw, 2010). A school that builds a culture such as this creates a community and an environment that invites student learning. Such school cultures are not easily built, but through practices such as restorative justice, we can create the environment that our students need and desire (Schiff & Bazemore, 2005; Zaslaw, 2010).

Restorative Justice

Restorative justice is a promising practice to address what are typically thought of as "classroom management" issues. To fully comprehend its potential, we must first understand its meaning and from where these practices derive. According to Zaslaw (2010) restoration is "repairing the harm, holding the offending student accountable, and rebuilding relationships in the school setting" (p. 11). This gives a glimpse of what restorative justice could look like in schools. When we restore relationships, we can allow for people to tie the severed lines of relationship back together.

Restorative justice practices were first successfully used in the criminal justice system (Zaslaw, 2010). This is quite surprising, given the impact of SROs, zero tolerance policies, and school-to-prison pipeline. In terms of restoration in schools, when restoration takes place, it can create a culture of care that fosters the conditions for learning. One of the first steps of restorative justice is the formation of strong relationships among all in the school to create a community of learners (Schiff & Bazemore, 2005). This is key as it allows for all members to feel welcome, valued, and responsible for a greater whole of the community. When you show your students that you care about them, they will care to learn.

Restorative justice is not about punishing rule breakers. But rather, it is about repairing the harm caused to victims, offenders, and the whole community (Shiff & Bazemore, 2010). "Achieving justice and meaningful school discipline in a restorative way suggests that holding offenders or rule-breakers accountable is not about asking them to 'take the punishment,' but rather about ensuring that they take *responsibility* by making amends to their victims and the community" (Shiff & Bazemore, 2005, p. 72). Reistenberg (2007) (as cited in Shiff & Bazemore, 2010) perfectly encapsulates the ideals of restorative justice:

> A restorative philosophy emphasizes problem-solving approaches to discipline, attends to the social/emotional as well as the physical/ intellectual needs of students, recognizes the importance of the group to establish and practice agreed-upon norms and rules, and emphasizes prevention and early restorative intervention to create safe learning environments (p.73).

At its core, restorative justice emphasizes the process of relationship rebuilding in order to create learning environments that **fosters safety and learning**. These two goals of restorative justice align with the often-stated purpose of bringing SROs in schools and do so in a way that builds community rather than increases surveillance and criminalization of behavior.

In terms of the classroom, restorative intervention has three core principles (Schiff & Bazemore, 2005, p. 73):

> 1) the extent to which the response repairs the harm to the victim, community, offenders and their families;
>
> 2) the extent to which each stakeholder is involved in the discussion of the incident and is given input into the plan for repair; and
>
> 3) the extent to which community and government roles (e.g., the criminal justice system, education system) are transformed to allow communities a greater voice and increased responsibility for responding to conflict, while other enforcement systems (e.g., schools) assume a more facilitative role.

The effectiveness of restorative justice lies in these principles. When they are implemented correctly in schools, the outcomes are significant. We see children who are not getting swept into the justice system. We see children learning and thinking critically. But, most importantly we see children caring about schools, themselves, and the world around them. Successful

implementation of restorative justice in schools has demonstrated increases in the well-being of students, sense of responsibility, learning, as well as decreased dropouts, and so many other positive outcomes (Zaslaw, 2010) and has done so without surveillance culture and harsh punishment.

In January 2005, a pilot program based on these restorative practices was implemented in a middle school in Michigan in order to help lower behavior issues. After the practices were put into place, they supported a drop of 15% in suspensions, averted two expulsions, resolved conflicts, and 93% of students used the methods and skills they were taught to resolve conflicts. These approaches not only allowed for successful disputes or conflicts and building relationships within the school, but it also taught children how to productively resolve issues that may arise. This case demonstrates just a portion of the potential these practices offer our schools (Zaslaw, 2010).

The continuous growth in learning that occurs within schools using restorative justice is only the beginning of positive outcomes. Restorative justice at its core uses the building of relationships to elevate the importance of community and encourage students to take responsibility for their actions and use these methods in and out of school—something SROs were originally placed in schools to do (Barnes, 2016). Furthermore, when we hold students responsible for their own actions, we make them accountable to one another, which builds them up instead of tearing them down, minimizing the need to "manage" students. With restorative justice, we instill the values students need to become responsible citizens and lifelong learners—much like the main goal of education. Restorative justice allows for an active assumption of responsibility. It is important as educators that we work to improve the systems in which we work to cultivate our future citizens.

In addition, restorative justice has "shown strong results in keeping students in school and off the streets in various jurisdictions around the United States and the world" (Schiff & Bazemore, 2005, p. 73). Further, "there is now considerable evidence that restorative approaches can produce a promising number of positive outcomes in the academic environment, including reduced suspension and expulsion, decreased disciplinary referrals, improved academic achievement, and other beneficial results" (Schiff & Bazemore, 2005, p. 73). The decrease in behavioral referrals and suspensions, police tickets, out-of-school suspensions and in violent reports were all things that SROs and zero tolerance policies were meant to do and instead are all results of restorative justice practices (Schiff & Bazemore, 2005). Restorative justice can and will help us rebuild our schools from the ground up—something that is needed and desired.

In terms of our children's futures, zero tolerance policies and the school-to-prison pipeline will hopefully cease to exist, learning and growth will be valued, a welcoming and caring environment will be felt by all, and our schools will produce well-prepared, active citizens for our democratic society. Restorative justice policies have the potential to repair the harm that has been done as a result of zero tolerance, a focus on discipline and punishment, and SROs policing students. It has the promise to improve our broken school system and to build it back together. It emphasizes the process of relationship building in order to create environments that fosters safety and learning—much like the original intent of SROs. Change is what we need, and it begins with some serious adjustments within our school walls.

Policy Recommendations

In terms of change, there is a lot that needs to occur if we desire our children to learn. From what I have personally witnessed, studied in school, and researched for this literature

review, I believe the changes that need to be made should be systemic. If this is done, a full shift towards restorative justice schools that embrace all identities, help students think critically, and prepare them to become lifelong learners and citizens in this society will take place. It may seem daunting, but I believe the results make it so worth it.

As stated above, SROs are not the sole contributor to the zero tolerance and other strict discipline policies, or the school-to-prison pipeline; these policies and regulations were already in place in many schools. But in lieu of the issues SROs perpetuate in schools, I suggest that we remove SROs from all discipline and management roles. While they can remain in schools to maintain the safety of the school and protect against any external threats, they should not be seen in a role outside of safety or community bridging.

The next policy recommendation is that schools should adopt restorative justice practices. Restorative justice policies in schools can positively and significantly change the way our schools look and, most importantly, feel. This is because relationships and responsibility are put at the forefront of education. One of the reasons why learning is not maximized in schools is because students don't feel valued, welcome, and even safe in schools. The stress of one mistake resulting in expulsion or suspension seen through zero tolerance policies, is preventing students from learning as much as they could. By replacing zero tolerance policies with restorative justice, relationships are built between each student, teacher, administration, and learning is prioritized.

Another factor that continues to affect our school system is teacher prep programs. While I enjoyed my time at Ball State University, and I learned a lot, there were classes and curriculums that did not prepare me in the ways that I believed they should. I was able to seek out opportunities that helped prepare me to become a culturally responsive educator. I believe

that being a culturally responsive educator is about prioritizing relationship building with my students and creating activities and experiences that relate to their lives, who they are, and the world around us in order to learn (Weinstein, 2003). In being a culturally responsive educator, I understand how school systems are often set up to harm rather than help students, especially those from marginalized or minoritized backgrounds. I also know that being a culturally responsive educator means that I should, and must, reflect upon my own preconceived biases. This being said, the classes required, experiences in practicums, and values impressed upon us should shift towards preparing us to become educators, not just teachers. A teacher is just a job title and only focuses on giving instruction, whereas, an educator sees their students as people first and focuses on the importance of building relationships that fosters a community of learners—much like culturally responsive practices (Weinstein, 2003) and restorative justice (Schiff & Bazemore, 2005).

There needs to be more classes in teacher programs that talk about abilities, disabilities, inclusion, diversity, equity, and social justice. While we are required to take one class that addresses this topic as a whole, it is not nearly enough to talk about such important topics in the span of one class. I argue for the need for a larger focus for pre-service teachers to reflect upon themselves, their backgrounds, biases, and ways in which their lens affects their teaching. We need to learn what beliefs or backgrounds we carry with us each day. We need to know that privilege is real, consuming our society, and shapes our views of our students. But most importantly, we need to know how all of this affects our students. In this realization, we can see the need for a way of teaching that includes methods for teaching for social justice and equity, and inclusion of all types of learners. The traditional "management" classes teach practices that go against restorative justice practices. The foundation of our learning as pre-service teachers

now is only reaffirming the broken systems we have today by recreating the conditions that allow for zero tolerance, increased number of youth in our justice system, and other problematic issues to flourish. I believe pre-service teacher programs should be equipping their teachers with the skills to implement practices such as restorative justice. This type of preparation is necessary in order to successfully prepare an educator to teach our youth.

While course changes will help teachers become more prepared, school systems also need to change. As was stated in the earlier section, restorative justice policies are extremely successful in school and help to create a caring, welcoming environment for our learners. Along with this, schools should emphasize the importance of community in and outside the school. To emphasize community is to demonstrate the need for relationships that foster the conditions for learning. When we as educators choose to promote a room full of care, our children know and can feel the difference. In order to accomplish this, classrooms should have "family" meetings, discuss real world issues, accept all children, and create a culture of learning. All of these things help children see their value. This shift is so important in creating environments that welcome learners, not push them away.

These systemic changes are just a few among the many that can be done to shift the school system towards one that supports instead of breaks down our children. The original goal of placing SROs in school was to promote community. Later, SROs were also expected to improve safety by protecting from external threats. We know that this did not happen and instead we have seen an increase in the policing of students and harmful outcomes. It is crucial for these recommendations to be invested in for the sake of our nation. We cannot continue perpetuating a broken system. We must take a stand. We must seek change. These are the changes that we wish to seek. Are you ready?

Conclusion

For too long, schools have turned to increased surveillance and policing, management of students, and zero tolerance policies. While the presence of SROs is not solely responsible for these trends, SROs continue to perpetuate a system that reinforces control of students in the form of harsher punishments and eventually results in the school-to-prison pipeline. All of the policies in place have had the reverse effect of their original intent to maintain the safety of students and teachers. If we fail to recognize the normalization of SROs as management tools and the problem with harsher punishments in response to minor infractions, our students' futures may be negatively impacted and their likelihood of encountering the justice system increases (Bleakley & Bleakley, 2018; Fowler, 2011; Cole, 2019). There is a lot of work to be done, and it is the job of those in contact with students to not contribute to students' time spent out of school, or worse, in prison. We can, should, and must do more.

It is time to rethink long-held assumptions about compliance in schools and our strategies to engage students in learning (Rubin, 2012). Educators have a deeper purpose than simply preparing children to sit, listen, and learn. "They [Teachers] must recognize their obligation to help children learn how to shape the present and future rather than merely conform to the status quo" (Rubin, 2012 p. 45). In order to do so, schools' views of learning must change. Educators must focus on engaging students in the learning process through "intrinsic motivation; higher order thinking; increased social, emotional, and academic competence; and creativity, productivity, and moral thinking" (Rubin, 2012, citing Catalano et al., 2002 p. 45). When this is at the forefront of educational purposes, students begin to engage and thrive in the learning process. Teachers have been equipped to "manage" and "control" students instead of building relationships to foster learning. While it is true that "schools are expected to maintain some level

of discipline in order to ensure a safe and stable learning environment for all students" (Bleakley & Bleakley, 2018 p. 248), rather than utilizing "management" strategies, schools should focus on the goals of engagement in relationships and developing critical thinking within students. When schools make these connections, rebuilding practices found in restorative justice can initiate student progression of learning (Schiff & Bazemore, 2005; Zaslaw, 2010). They certainly should not be relying on SROs to manage and discipline students.

It is time to rethink our approach in schools. I argue that SROs should be removed from discipline and management roles. If SROs are to remain in schools, their only jurisdiction should be to focus on protecting our students from external threats. Additionally, schools should engage in restorative justice practices that are focused on student/teacher accountability, repairing harm, and teaching students to take responsibility. Restorative justice practices seek to address the underlying causes that prompt student behaviors and ultimately build a community of lifelong learners—much like the goal of schools. With the removal of SROs and the implementation of restorative justice, schools can form relationships in order to better serve students' mental, physical, and intellectual needs and create a safe learning environment for all. It is time for a shift in our schools. The time is now.

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